

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES
APRIL 1, 2010

Members Present: Daniel Clapp, Joan Golowich, Joel Gordon, Doris Holden, Kathy Koplow, Mary Jane Laus, Barbara Sutherland, and Juana Trujillo

Absent: Rosemary Kofler

Select Board Liaison: Stephanie O'Keefe (Select Board Chair)

Staff President: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plane (Assistant Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant)

Guests: Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), Randall Stokes (Study Director for the Council on Aging 2010 Survey), Shirley Lauder (Vice President of the Friends of the Amherst Senior Center); Beatrice Dragon, Ida Kain, Joelle Adlerbaum, Lillian Scott, Eleanor Vanetzian, Shirley Packard, Judith Stein, Dick Stein, Susan St. John, Heidi Overby, Bob Johnston, Paul Shepard, Bill Thompson, Leslie Arriola, Hannah Brunner, Alan Root, Judith Fish, Marjorie S. Babb and others who didn't sign the guest list. Scott Merzbach (Gazette Reporter).

Welcome: Dan Clapp, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:32 AM.

Minutes of Previous Meeting: The minutes of the March 4, 2010, meeting were approved and accepted.

Friends' Treasurer Report:

Doris provided a handout showing \$13,697.39 in the checking account and \$69,132.70 in the investment account. She reported that \$1245.00 in donations to the Friends had been received since the last meeting. The Treasurer's Report was approved and accepted.

Conversation with Larry Shaffer:

Dan opened the conversation by complimenting Larry on his new hairdo. **Larry** responded by pointing that his head had been shaved for charity but not for all time. He then remarked on his trip with Nancy to the Northampton and Belchertown Senior Centers. He thought the buildings were fine in terms of space and facilities, but what particularly caught his attention was the small number of seniors using either facility. Why was the participation so small? For example he looked at the login page in the computer room and found that only five people had signed in during the previous week. These observations raise questions such as "how do we allocate space efficiently?" and "how do we, with the assets we have, tailor programs for the Senior Center to the actual present and future needs of seniors rather than to their past needs or to our perceptions of their needs." He said that he is as committed as we (the COA) are. But we must remember that he has commitments and obligations to other departments in the town.

Larry said that relative to plans he has no plans at present but only ideas that he wants to share with us. He will have a conversation with Bangs department heads this afternoon about "how we can meet the needs of the Senior Center, LSSE, and the Health Department and about how we can best apply our services and assets. Change is in the air and we must find out how to deal effectively with our many needs." He said he "hopes that the departments in the Bangs Center can mesh their activities not upon departmental lines, but upon functional lines." He said that he has "philosophical inclinations" that he'd like to pursue, "but the practical implementation of those ideas at the Bangs Center has not yet begun." It is up to the department heads, who know the problems better than he, to pursue these matters. He would ask all of those involved to engage with open minds and hearts in these ongoing discussions among the three departments. He looks forward to our cooperation and indulgence. He asked to please give him a chance to oversee this review, and not to protest before it is carried out. He reminded us that his obligation is not just to the Senior Center, but to the entire Bangs Center and to the Town.

Dan: Since the last COA meeting the override has been passed. Will passage affect your planning and the functioning of the Senior Center?

Larry: Not much effect except that we now have more time to plan.

Dan: How does the passage of the override affect the position and activities of Karen?

Larry: The individual won't be affected at all as regards her hours, although there may be some changes in her duties.

Dan: Could you say a bit more about your philosophy?

Larry: We need to search out ways to meet and deal with the changes we face. We must learn how to do more with less. When we met with the governor we learned that we might face a five or ten percent cutback in funding for FY 2012. If that happens, all departments will be back in trouble. We have declining resources and we must find ways of dealing with that reality. It's not 1975 any more. Yet we must learn how to build a Senior Center that, even with all our financial constraints, can deal with the needs of Amherst's present and future senior citizens.

Comments from guests in attendance:

Bob Johnston: Is it reasonable to expect us to defer our criticism until procedures are embarked upon? Mr. Johnston then asked the chair for permission to read a petition. The petition was read and then presented to Mr. Shaffer. (A copy of petition is on file at the Senior Center.)

Dan: Our role is to advise, to assist, to advocate. We are not protesting.

Alan Root: I think we are protesting. We should say what kinds of changes would be objectionable; we should point out where needed services are not provided. We need new ideas and we need to be creative. For example, have you considered having senior center activities based at Munson Library?

Dr. Stein: We should avoid concentrating too much on the numbers of people using a senior center or on the dollars spent. We must think of the quality of the service provided as well as on cost effectiveness.

Shirley Packard: The Senior Center is different from other departments. Its concern is to provide human services to people, and standards of efficiency that may be appropriate for other departments, may not be appropriate for the Senior Center. What data are you basing your recommendations on?

Larry: The services provided by the SC are not so very different from those provided by other departments – Health, LSSE.

Heidi Overby: Mr. Shaffer, leave our senior center alone. Some seniors have needs that are filled by the Senior Center. I live on less than \$800/month. I have lived at the Ann Whalen house for 21 years. My apartment is small, dark, in need of redecoration. A major problem for me and other seniors like me is loneliness and depression. I go to the senior center for light, for friendship, for its activities. Please, Mr. Shaffer, make friends with us. I appeal to you, be compassionate, listen to us.

Joelle Adlerblum: Senior Centers elsewhere don't reflect the needs of Amherst's elderly population. Amherst is different. The senior population is not diminishing. The senior centers in Northampton and Belchertown are not as well-established as the Amherst Senior Center. Our senior center staff knows us individually, we are a person-to-person group.

Steffanie O'Keefe: I very much support what Larry is doing. Not only do I support him, but the Select Board has directed him to look for new ways to confront the new economic situation facing Amherst. We have to change. We must protect the services that are important, but we must be able to change and to adapt. But also we need feedback, such as is being provided here today. We have to change, for nothing stays static, yet we must embrace change in ways that are constructive.

Dan: Let me ask all of us to make a positive effort to bring about efficient and effective change. Change should be positive, but it should not be made without input from Amherst's seniors. Please send your suggestions to Larry, to Nancy, or to me.

Larry: I'd like to reiterate that no decisions have been made. We must blunt rumors to the contrary. We'll work closely and openly with the department heads. Together we can make a stronger and better senior center.

Continuing Business:

Final Survey and discussion with Randall Stokes:

Dr. Randall Stokes spoke about the survey and some of its findings.

Randall: As a response to an observation made earlier in this meeting that most faces seen at the Amherst Senior Center are white, let me point out that the survey we have completed contains many facts, one of which is that most of those who responded to the survey are white. If we make the assumption that this sample is representative of Amherst seniors as a whole, then it is not surprising that the great majority of those who use the Senior Center are white. We think it reasonable to make this assumption about the survey because the 735 responses to the survey correspond to a greater than 40% return.

The questionnaire in the survey had 6 principal areas of concern:

- 1) The services provided by the Senior Center - how many and what kind of people use those services, which services are used, how satisfactory are those services, what factors inhibit or limit use of Center services, are there additional services needed?
- 2) Care giving – how many seniors assist others, how demanding are the tasks associated with assisting, does the person being assisted have memory problems, do those providing care have the necessary financial resources, would some form of adult day care be of assistance?
- 3) Care taking – with which routine activities, if any, do respondents have or need assistance, do respondents have all the help that is needed, do respondents anticipate that current care giving arrangements will continue?.
- 4) Social Isolation – what is the extent of respondents' circle of friends and family, what are the frequency and nature of contacts with friends and family, what is the frequency with which respondents are able to get out of their homes?
- 5) Demographics - age distribution, income, levels of education, marital status, health status, etc.
- 6) The future – what is the projected size of elder population, what are the plans for retirement for those who not already retired, what are their plans to remain in Amherst, what concerns might affect their decision to remain in Amherst?

Randall then briefly amplified some of these questions and pointed out that the central conclusions of the survey can be found on page 36 of the Report. He noted the very high proportion of seniors who use the services of the Senior Center (2/3 of those over 70), and the very high level of satisfaction of those who use those services. All but a few grumps like what they found at the senior center. There was also considerable interest expressed in having an exercise room at the SC.

Alan Root: Ann Whalen has a very diverse population, but I feel that the Senior Center must work harder to bring Latinos to the Senior Center.

Randall: I think there will be a big increase in the senior population in the coming years. I don't think sampling error of the minority population is likely to be as big a problem as sampling the ill, the poor, and the disadvantaged.

An unidentified guest: I would urge the Chair to make the Town Manager aware that a rising senior population will require additional services.

Dan: I urge all of you who have ideas or thoughts to let us know.

Amherst Follies:

Shirley Lauder announced that tickets are now being sold and we shall begin putting ads on the radio, the TV, and the newspapers. It is hoped that all will consider attending as it is going to be a grand affair.

Eveline Sears Senior Activists Awards Nominations:

Nancy announced that Rosemary has nominated Dan and Doris to be recipients of this year's award. She spoke of the many contributions to the Senior Center and to the seniors in Amherst that have been made by both nominees. Despite some mild protestation by Dan, Nancy suggested that we vote on the two nominations. A motion toward this end was made, seconded and approved. **Nancy** recommended putting off the volunteer recognition social until next September.

Senior Health Advisory Committee (SHAG) report:

Dan announced that Dr. Ellie Vanetzian gave a preview of a talk that she is to give on April 8th at the Bangs Community Center. The topic will be "Self Management of Your Ongoing Health Care." He also noted that there was a discussion of how SHAG can provide productive input into the discussions regarding changes at the Senior Center.

Highland Valley Elder Services:

Joan: There was nothing new this week, but at the next meeting the topic is protective services. That is, when a senior appears to be capable of self damage, authorities must be called in. Joan wants to know who those authorities are.

Maura: Protective services also have to do with exploitation of elders by others. There are many legal ramifications that arise from trying to deal with these kinds of problems.

Changes Sub-Committee:

Dan: It seems difficult to incorporate LSSE with the Senior Center and the Health Department, partly because of spatial considerations and because the services offered are in many ways different. This subcommittee is looking for ways to help Nancy and Larry in working on this problem. Our subcommittee thinks it would be possible to have a single person at a reception desk who could fill the needs of both the Senior Center and the Health Department. The first floor could accommodate the offices and other needs of these two departments, but it would be virtually impossible to include LSSE on that floor as well. We have two different plans for fitting in both the SC and the HD which we hope will be considered.

Alan Root: Would it be possible to locate LSSE in one of the Amherst Schools rather than in the center of town. **Dan:** I don't know that we have considered that, but it is a good suggestion, one that we'll look into.

Staff Reports:

Nancy: The Boston Post Cane will be presented at 11:30 AM next Tuesday, April 6th to Dorothy Burke at The Arbors at a special event luncheon. She'll be turning 100 this summer and has lived in Amherst for more than 10 years which is a prerequisite to receive the honor. This event will be covered by the newspaper media.

Bank of Exchange Value Event:

Maura: On Friday, April 23rd there will be a supper with some entertainment at the Amherst College Alumni House (around 4:00 or 5:00 PM) for the Bank of Exchange Value (bartering for services). Rick Lowe and Wendy Ewald have brought this group together. There will be more news, e.g. fliers posted at Amherst College, the Senior Center, Ann Whalen House, Clark House, etc.

The next meeting of the COA meeting will be held on Thursday, May 6 at 9:00 AM. Please note: The meeting will begin at 9:00 AM not at 9:30.

The meeting adjourned at 10:57 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Joel Gordon, Acting Secretary

The approved minutes of the March 4, 2010 meeting were delivered to the Select Board Office to be filed.